

Distance Learning PhD

1. Background

- 1.1 The University of Birmingham (UoB) permits postgraduate researchers (PGRs) to read for the degree of PhD on a full-time and part-time basis, ie PGRs must be resident for specified periods of time at UoB. PGRs registered on a split location basis spend the majority of their period of study away from UoB, with short periods of time at UoB: full-time PhD a minimum of six months and a maximum of 12 months over the whole period of study. In addition, through exemptions granted by the University Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC), the requirement for students registered for the PhD Applied Linguistics to spend specific periods of time at UoB was lifted.
- 1.2 With modern-day communications and technology, particularly where research materials are available in a PGR's home location or home country rather than in the UK, and supervisory support equivalent to that set out in UoB Legislation, it is no longer deemed essential by academic staff for PGRs to be required to spend their entire period of study at UoB.
- 1.3 Senate, at its meeting held on 20 March 2012, approved the proposal that a distance learning mode of study for the degree of PhD should be introduced at UoB in the College of Arts and Law as a pilot, alongside full-time, part-time and split location and the distance learning PhD in Applied Linguistics. It is for this reason that, throughout this document, reference is made to practices within the College of Arts and Law.

2. Definition of PhD by Distance Learning Mode of Study (DL PhD)

- 2.1 PGRs registered for the degree of PhD by DL mode of study will undertake the majority of their research in a PGR's home location or home country away from UoB, with compulsory short visits to UoB, including attendance for the examination of the thesis.

Note: different institutions and/or other countries may use different terms for this mode of study, for example, distance without attendance, remote location scheme, distance-based, distance learning by electronic means, distance e-learning, external research.

3. Aims of the DL PhD

- 3.1 The aims of the DL PhD are:
 - to provide a new mode of study for PhD study at UoB;
 - to increase the recruitment of high-quality PhD PGRs;
 - to drive forward innovative pedagogic practice, and, ultimately,

- to enhance UoB's global research reputation.

4. Principles of DL PhDs

- 4.1 The following principles, which will apply to DL PhDs, have been written with reference to UoB Legislation, including Codes of Practice particularly Admission of Students, Supervision and Monitoring Progress of PGRs, extant DL PhD platforms at UoB and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Part B Assessing and enhancing academic quality: Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching.

Initial Introduction at UoB

- 4.2 Within the College of Arts and Law (CAL) in addition to full-time, part-time, split location and distance PhD Applied Linguistics variants.

- 4.3 On a full-time and part-time basis. Normally non-EU PGRs are excluded from part-time study because of visa requirements (it is an exception to the usual UKBA requirement for non-EU PGRs to be registered on a full-time basis. This part-time mode of study is only permitted for non-EU PGRs for the DL PhD).

- 4.4 The DL mode of PhD is not available to Research Council-funded PGRs.

Marketing

- 4.5 Formal degree title for the DL PhD will be the generic Doctor of Philosophy, as with all other modes of study for the degree of PhD unless an exemption has been granted. A "marketing" title may be used in any promotional literature, which be accurate and make clear precisely to which mode of study reference is being made.

Admissions

- 4.6 Meet the normal admission requirements for the degree of PhD.
- 4.7 Further admissions criteria must be met and demonstrated prior to a formal offer for admission being sent to the applicant (by completion of the Checklist to Accompany an Admissions Decision Form (Appendix 1)):

- 4.7.1 a strong application which shows evidence of the ability to study and undertake research independently, for example:
- the successful completion of an MA (or equivalent) by distance learning with merit or distinction, thereby having already demonstrated their ability to conduct research successfully by DL;
 - papers/presentations at professional and academic conferences;
 - publications in professional journals, newsletters, conference proceedings, and other relevant material;
 - previous completion of an independent research project which can be assessed by potential supervisors.
- 4.7.2 a minimum technological requirement to be met. All applicants will be interviewed using the same technology that will be employed in

supervisions (Skype or Facetime). This will enable the supervisory team to check that the applicant can operate comfortably within the technological constraints of the programme;

- 4.7.3 the suitability of the chosen residency location for research must be demonstrated. Applicants will be required to evince, and provide evidence, that they will be able to carry out their research where they are living. For example, they will need to demonstrate, and provide confirmation, that they will be able to access appropriate archives, data collections, and other relevant material;
- 4.7.4 full reasons (academic, personal and any other) as to why the DL rather than the standard modes of study are applicable.
- 4.8 Approval to study by DL will only be sought during the admissions process, and will not be made available to PGRs who are already registered on a full-time or part-time or split location basis.
- 4.9 DL PhD maximises flexibility and decreases the need for travel and actual presence at UoB, apart from key specified times, but it does not decrease the time and commitment required for serious and successful PhD study by the PGR. The Checklist to Accompany an Admissions Decision Form, will elicit such information, together with other arrangements, and must be approved by the supervisor and Head of School (or nominee) prior to any admissions offer letter being sent to the applicant.

University legislation

- 4.10 PGRs subject to University Legislation while studying on a DL basis.

Annual Visits

- 4.11 PGRs required to visit UoB on four occasions during normal period of study:
 - 4.11.1 a two-week visit at the start of each academic year (or as appropriate depending upon the PGR's start date) for three years;
 - 4.11.2 a final visit for the viva examination.

Note (1): Details of the visits should be agreed, using the Checklist to Accompany an Admissions Decision form, so that guidance can be provided to the applicant concerning visa and immigration requirements. Any variations to the schedule of visits must be agreed and notified to Academic Services so that no immigration rules are breached.

Note (2): Exemptions for non-attendance at the annual UoB visits shall be granted only in exceptional circumstances through the University Research Progress and Awards Sub Panel.

- 4.12 Visits to UoB will serve a number of functions:
 - 4.12.1 *Induction activities:*

to include intensive research skills and resources training, alongside individually-tailored project development and agenda setting with supervisory teams, and educational and social visits around the campus and city.

PGRs should receive a clear and realistic explanation of the expectations placed upon them for DL study, and for the nature and extent of autonomous, collaborative and supported aspects of learning.

PGRs will have access to the new CAL DL induction package which will incorporate both skills and project development elements, together the WebCT-based training and career development resources available through the CAL Graduate School.

PGRs will be have access to the online University Graduate School DR Essentials, which provides induction and related materials.

4.12.2 *Annual attendance at UoB*

to enable standard progress review panels to take place, in accordance with the UoB Code of Practice on the Supervision and Monitoring Progress of Postgraduate Researchers (Section 3).

4.12.3 *Promote a feeling of community among the DL PhD PGRs*

to provide an opportunity for PGRs to share experiences and network. Moreover, it will enable the CAL Graduate School to deliver supplementary face-to-face research and skills training.

4.12.4 *Introduction of GRS4 form*

to complete a confidential annual feedback form by the PGR. The form will request, for example, details of the number of supervisions which the PGRs have received. The information returned will be analysed by the University Graduate School, and appropriate action taken where any issues might have arisen.

Supervisory Arrangements

- 4.13 Supervisory arrangements will be equivalent to those enjoyed by PhD PGRs registered by other modes of study. The primary difference will be that DL PhD PGRs will participate in their supervisions via visual communication media such as Skype or Facetime, instead of on an 'in-person' face-to-face basis.
- 4.14 Those responsible for the allocation of supervisory arrangements in CAL must ensure that supervisors are fully aware of the commitment required of them for supervision on a DL basis. The time and commitment for supervisors will be not less, and may even be more, for DL supervision.
- 4.15 It is sometimes suggested that PGRs may suffer from isolation during their studies, leading in turn to a lack of motivation. This is much more likely to occur with PGRs who are studying for a DL PhD. All of the standard support structures and those for DL students must be fully available to all PGRs. As with all PGR programmes, the supervisory team will take pastoral responsibility for the

welfare of DL PhD PGRs throughout their study period.

Monitoring Progress

- 4.16 Will be equivalent to that for PhD PGRs registered on other modes of study. DL PGRs will be required to be in attendance at UoB for annual progress reviews, although this process, in exceptional circumstances, may be managed remotely using video conferencing.
- 4.17 PGRs and supervisors will maintain a complete record of all correspondence between each other, including supervisory reports, a history of progress, using the online PGR Management System.

Support Arrangements

- 4.18 DL PhD PGRs will have full access to support material through the CAL Graduate School website, including a handbook, which together with other relevant material, including financial arrangements, will be hosted on a dedicated WebCT resource, alongside e-library material;

Examination Arrangements

- 4.19 The examination of the thesis, as with all PhDs, will be held at UoB, unless a request (made by the PGR) to hold it elsewhere or by video/telephone conference has been approved by the University Research Progress and Awards Sub Panel.

Note (1): Exemptions from attending at UoB will only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

Note (2): Existing arrangements within the PhD Applied Linguistics programme already allow for remote oral examination to take place (though it is not considered ideal), with the consent of the external examiner.

4.20 *Financial Arrangements*

The tuition fee for the DL mode of study will be as for the standard PhD, and will include:

- 4.20.1 an economy flight and local transport per visit, including the final visit for the viva. (The ceiling for travel costs will be different for Home, EU and non-EU students.) Full-time students will be entitled to four visits, as will part-time, though for the latter they will be two years apart;
- 4.20.2 accommodation (University Conference Park) expenses for PGRs on each of their visits to UoB;
- 4.20.3 small stipend to cover any local library costs that the PGRs may incur.

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

PhD by DISTANCE LEARNING (DL) MODE OF STUDY: CHECKLIST TO ACCOMPANY AN ADMISSIONS DECISION FORM

This form has been designed to assist the School to consider a range of requirements above the normal admission criteria for PhD study.

While the DL mode of study PhD maximises flexibility and decreases the need for travel and actual presence at UoB, apart from key specified times, it does not decrease the time and commitment required for serious and successful PhD study.

As well as the academic entry requirements, prospective students, who wish to register for the degree of PhD by DL mode of study, must provide evidence that they have the time, commitment and facilities needed to work at a distance, with good reason for not residing in the UK whilst undertaking their research, and a clear and focussed research proposal.

Applicant's Details

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Surname | |
| Forenames | UoB ID No |
| Previous qualifications, grade and subject (especially distance and research related) and English Language proficiency | |
| Extent of postgraduate research experience and ability to work independently, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• papers/presentations at professional and academic conferences• publications in professional journals, newsletters conference proceedings, etc• previous completion of an independent research project which can be assessed by potential supervisors | |
| Subject and focus of research topic (if not already provided with application form) | |

Distance Learning Mode of Study

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| i) | Full-time/part-time* |
| *Please delete as appropriate | |
| ii) | Please provide full reasons (academic, personal and other) for registering for a PhD by DL mode of study rather than by standard full-time or part-time modes of study. |

Place of Study

| | |
|---|--|
| Please provide details and evidence of the following: | |
| i) | access to library facilities |
| ii) | access to IT facilities |
| iii) | access to communications, including e-mail |
| iv) | access to and availability of research materials, archives, data collections, other appropriate/relevant material and/or equipment |
| v) | contact with other experienced research workers and academic staff |
| vi) | access to local seminars |
| vii) | access to facilities to support any study-related disability |

Individual Study Plan (including time available for study), and Attendance at the University of Birmingham

| | Date | Duration |
|-------------------------|------|----------|
| Year 1 | | |
| Year 2 | | |
| Year 3 | | |
| Year 4 | | |
| Additional Information: | | |

Induction

| |
|---|
| Please specify what arrangements will be put in place for the Induction to be undertaken. |
|---|

Training Needs Analysis (TNA)

| |
|--|
| Please specify: |
| i) What arrangements will be put in place for the TNA to be completed? |

| | |
|-----|---|
| ii) | What skills training opportunities might exist near to the place of research? |
| ii) | What budgetary arrangements are in place for attendance at commercially available training should it be available (for example project management training) |

Supervisory Arrangements

Please list names of supervisory team, with information concerning how its expertise matches that of the applicant's proposed area of research

Arrangements for Supervisory Contact

Please give details of how it is planned that supervisory contact will be maintained in accordance with the University of Birmingham's Code of Practice for Supervision and Monitoring of Progress of Postgraduate Researchers:

- Technology to be employed
- Frequency of supervision sessions
- Procedure for arrangement of supervision session
- Proposed method of contact for supervision session

Arrangements for Annual Progress Monitoring

Please provide details of the arrangements for annual progress monitoring.

Records of Supervisory and other Contact

Please provide details of how it is planned that a log of supervisory and other contact is maintained by both the supervisor and student (to be made available to UoB when requested).

Approval (1)

| | |
|---------------------------|------|
| Signature (Supervisor) | Date |
| Name (Please print) | |

Approval (2)

| | |
|---|------|
| Signature (Head of School/Department or nominee) | Date |
| Name (Please print) | |